

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510 May 12, 2014 COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

FOREIGN RELATIONS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki Secretary U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 810 Vermont Ave., NW Washington DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

I am deeply concerned about media reports referencing a secret electronic wait list maintained by a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center (VAMC) in Arizona that may have caused delayed medical care for certain veterans, resulting in injuries and even deaths. I understand you have rightly directed an immediate investigation into the matter. However, I believe further steps need to be taken to determine if other VAMCs are engaging in similar practices. The VA needs to obtain data on all VAMC's timeframes for diagnosis and treatment, and determine if any veterans died or were injured in situations where there was delayed medical care.

I am writing to request you obtain, and provide me with electronic wait list data for all VA medical centers in Florida, and please include information from the VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System in Biloxi, MS since it treats veterans residing in Florida's Panhandle. In addition to that data I am also seeking your assurances that the VAMCs treating Floridians are not keeping their own separate, secret wait lists that have not been disclosed.

In February 2014 the VAMC Orlando acknowledged an electronic wait list when the American Legion visited the medical center as part of its "System Worth Saving" site visits. At that time, VAMC Orlando officials acknowledged a wait list of approximately 2,400 patients who were waiting to be seen for specialty care appointments. VAMC officials said the wait list was due to a combination of the need for additional space to treat veterans and the lack of available VA physicians to provide care. At the same time, officials said they spent \$130 million on non-VA care in 2013 to help provide more timely care to Central Florida veterans. The expectation expressed by VA officials at the time was that the planned operation of the new VAMC Orlando at Lake Nona in 2015 would help alleviate the need for the wait list due to the new facility having additional treatment space and more providers. My Orlando staff asked that VAMC Orlando officials provide an update during their April 17, 2014 quarterly meeting; however, the topic was not addressed. With thousands of Central Florida veterans impacted by the situation, I would appreciate an update on the VAMC Orlando's wait list.

I realize that VA physicians cannot treat all veterans at the same time and that they do prioritize patient care based on medical necessity, but it is apparent to me the agency needs to work on its timeliness and reexamine its methodology of providing medical care to veterans. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to receiving the electronic wait list data on Florida veterans at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely.

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U.S. Senator